

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, HARRIMAN BUILDING
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1180)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-G
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, HARRIMAN BUILDING (Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1180) Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-G

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located within the block bounded by Quill Drive on the north,¹ Rives Avenue on the east, Imperial Highway on the south, and Old River School Road on the west. The Harriman Building faces south toward Imperial Highway.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
392900.184055E; 3754837.42405 N

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Office space

Significance: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center is significant for its role in the evolution of the County of Los Angeles's (County's) provision of medical and social services to residents of the County. Beginning as the County Poor Farm in 1887/1888, it initially was an agricultural facility that provided work, housing, and medical care for the indigent to relieve the overburdened Los Angeles County Hospital system. By the 1910s, an increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm, causing a transition from providing rehabilitative, short-term treatment for the impoverished to a long-term patient care facility. The construction of a new hospital building in 1930, originally named the Medical Building but long known as the Harriman Building, represented the shift from a County Poor Farm to a respected healthcare facility. The building was intended to be the first step in the implementation of a new master plan that would provide the spaces and equipment required to modernize medical care and was the first hospital building to be located in the portion of the property located north of Imperial Boulevard. Upon the completion of the new Medical Building, then-Superintendent William R. Harriman petitioned to change the name of the institution from the antiquated "County Farm" to "Rancho Los Amigos." The new name was officially adopted in 1932.² Located north of Imperial Highway, the Harriman Building has become the symbol for the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, the most visible, one of the most architecturally accomplished, and the most widely recognized building of the institution.

¹ For clarification purposes and ease of labeling, directions are given using project north, which is 45 degrees northeast of true north. Please see compass on aerial map with photo key, *Exterior Photo Key: Harriman Building*, for clarification.

² *Los Angeles Times*. 14 October 1932. "Amigos Rancho: Over the Hill," p. 11.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1930
2. **Architect:** Karl W. Muck (County architect)
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present).
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present).
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with this building.
6. **Original plans and construction:** Original plans can be found at the Facilities Management Department located at the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations to the Harriman Building include the enclosure of the arcade on the south elevation, the balcony exit located in the courtyard, and an entrance for ambulances on the eastern elevation, and the replacement of several original windows and doors. A new Polio Respiratory Center, attached to the north and west elevations of the Harriman Building, was constructed circa 1954.

B. Historic Context:

By the end of the 1920s, most of the buildings now extant on what is now known as the south campus of Rancho Los Amigos had been constructed. These buildings included the infirmary wards, general wards, and psychiatric wards; kitchen and dining rooms; staff housing; a power plant; and assorted agricultural and shop buildings, among others. In acknowledgement of the new medical mission of the institution, Superintendent Harrison developed a master plan that focused on the north campus and envisioned the development of a 2,500-bed hospital and appurtenant facilities. The building now known as the Harriman Building was to be the first phase in the realization of the master plan; however, the Depression and World War II intervened, and most subsequent improvement of the north campus was deferred until the postwar years.

In 1930, Superintendent Harriman constructed a modern medical building (i.e., the Harriman Building) north of the original buildings, at the northern terminus of Erickson Avenue. Designed in an amalgam of the Mission Revival and Spanish Revival styles by County Architect Karl W. Muck, the building was intended to recall Mission San Luis Rey in appearance. It was filled with the latest equipment, laboratories, and surgery facilities, and provided separate rooms to isolate patients of varying illnesses. Two months after the completion of the building, the medical department, laboratories, dental services, various treatment rooms, X-ray, and the new surgical unit moved into the building, as did more than 200 patients. Although the County Farm had not yet been identified as an official hospital, major surgery was performed in the new building beginning in late 1931.

Over fourteen operations of seven different classifications were carried out the first year, saving the County the amount of money it would take to transport the patients to the County Hospital. The Medical Buildings was recognized as "one of the finest small hospitals" in California.³ In subsequent years, an emergency room was set up in the Medical Building to serve several communities in the area, including Artesia, Bellflower, Compton, Downey, Lynwood, and Norwalk. The building presently houses administrative functions for the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The Harriman Building is a two-story building constructed in a combination of the Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial styles of architecture. Character-defining features of the Harriman Building include (but are not limited to) concrete exterior walls, an espadaña accented by an arched niche, bell tower, rose window, decorative chimneys, gabled roof covered with barrel clay tile, wooden rafters, metal and wood multi-light windows, stringcourses and impost moldings, wrought iron gates and railings, central courtyard plan accented by a fountain, terra cotta paving, polychromatic tile accents, arcade, and porte cochere.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Harriman Building is good. The building has changed in use from a hospital to office space. The major alterations include the loss of original entrance doors, loss of several original windows, and the enclosure of the south arcade, a balcony, and a side entry for ambulance and emergency patients.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Harriman Building has a square floor plan with a central courtyard. The building stands 31'-5" from the basement floor to the second floor ceiling. The exterior building measurements for the Harriman Building are 186'-6" wide by 177'-10" deep.
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** The exterior walls are painted, poured-in-place-concrete and are a significant contributor to the overall character of the Harriman Building. Exposed structural elements include rounded rafter tails, beams, and braces under wide overhanging eaves.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The Harriman Building has a steel-framed structural system.

³ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, pp. 161–162.

5. Openings:

- a. Windows:** The fenestration of the Harriman Building consists primarily of multilight steel sash windows on the exterior and six-over-six wood sash windows within the courtyard. Other windows include fixed, multilight metal windows, metal-sash-louvered windows, and wood casement windows. The windows are set deep within the walls, with no sills.
- b. Doors:** Entrances into the Harriman Building are located on the north, east, south, and west elevations, as well as are centrally located on each elevation of the courtyard. The original doors have all been replaced, except for the pair of 10-light wood-framed French doors located on the balcony of the western corridor.

- 6. Roof:** The Harriman Building is surmounted by a medium-pitched gabled roof clad in barrel clay tiles. The roof has exposed rounded rafter tails beneath the overhanging eaves. Present beneath the eaves are round attic vents. The main entrance at the southeast corner of the facade has an espadaña with finial and arched niche and a bell tower. The bell tower stands 49'-8" tall.

- C. Description of Interior:** The Harriman Building was originally constructed for use as a medical building. Reassignments of space at Rancho Los Amigos during the 1950 and 1960s and the Harriman Building's location at the center of the north campus activities led to its shift from a solely medical building to a building with a mixed medical and administrative function. The first floor of the Harriman Building was remodeled into office space, circa 1966, to support its new administrative role. A lobby with an interior wooden balcony is located on the southeastern corner of the building. The lobby has exposed wood beams, two tiled window seats, saltillo flooring, and a round rose window.

D. Site:

- 1. Setting:** The setting surrounding the Harriman Building is generally characterized by hospital buildings, mature trees, shrubs, lawn, and flower beds. The building is located in a block bounded by Quill Drive to the north, Rives Avenue to the east, Imperial Highway to the south, and Old River School Road to the west. Located to the southeast of the building is a large parking lot for doctors and visitors.
- 2. Orientation:** The Harriman House is located north of the historic south campus. It is located on the northwest intersection of Imperial Highway and Erickson Drive and faces south toward Imperial Highway. A porte cochere is located on the southeastern corner of the building; an emergency and ambulance entrance is located on the east elevation.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Original drawings for the Harriman Building are located in the Facilities Management Department at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center and are attached as supplemental information.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

F. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of historic drawings
Aerial map with photo key

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation for Harriman Building was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from January to March 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles (County) Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Rancho Los Amigos Campus Plan project. Photographs were taken from January to February 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources analyst, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources analyst, and Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, cultural resources manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.